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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 001853

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SUBJECT: GREEK MFA INVOLVED IN ARRANGING VESSELS FOR BEIRUT  
EVACUATIONS

¶1. (U) Summary: Ambassador called on Deputy Foreign Minister Kassimis on July 17 to advise the GoG of current USG efforts regarding potential evacuations from Beirut, as well as enlist GoG aid in locating appropriate vessels for RFP N00033-06-R-5523, and raise the possibility that Souda Bay might be called upon to house and process evacuees in the event of a large-scale evacuation that overloads Limassol's capabilities. Kassimis provided a quick summary of on-going GoG evacuation efforts on behalf of Greek and other third-country nationals and Greek commercial ships contracted to the French and Swedish governments for evacuations. He also raised the issue that in his opinion Beirut was becoming an unsafe port, and that the GoG was evacuating from Tripoli and Latakia instead. Kassimis reacted positively to the possibility of using Souda Bay to process evacuees, should that become necessary, and made it clear that the Greek Embassy in Beirut would be ready to assist Amcits if required. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Ambassador called on Deputy Foreign Minister Kassimis on July 17 to discuss the possibility of large-scale evacuations of U.S. citizens from Beirut. Ambassador noted that it was prudent to assume that the crisis between Israel and Lebanon could continue, and that while the international community condemned the hostage taking, wants to see the Israeli hostages released, and has called on the Israeli government to show restraint, it was also useful to discuss evacuation planning with the GoG with an eye towards coordination. We especially would be interested in Greek help in identifying Greek vessels that could be used to shuttle U.S. and third country nationals from Lebanon to Cyprus.

¶3. (C) Kassimis observed that the GoG was already involved in evacuation efforts. The French Government contracted the passenger liner Iera Petra, which is already en route to Beirut. An "Anek-type" ferry (capacity 1100 passengers), the Coretta II, had already been chartered to the Swedish Government and was on its way to Tripoli. He said he had been in communication with Greek Minister of Mercantile Marine Kefaloyannis as to whether the Coretta II could make an additional trip as well. Kassimis also noted that the Hellenic Navy frigate Tsara was in Limassol today, and would be departing for Tripoli on the 18th to evacuate 200 people. He further added that the port in Beirut was rapidly becoming unsafe, and that current Greek efforts called for evacuations from the northern Lebanese port of Tripoli, or the Syrian port of Latakia. (Note: during the meeting, Kassimis was given an unverified report that an Italian frigate had just

been fired upon in Beirut, which Kassimis presented as further proof of the deteriorating security conditions there. End note.)

¶4. (U) Ambassador provided Kassimis with a copy of Military Sealift Command's contract call for passenger vessels (N000033-06-R-5523), and asked for the Minister's assistance in getting the message to any and all Greek ship owners and agencies that might have appropriate vessels available. Ambassador observed that there might be as many as 25,000 Amcits in Lebanon, and that all assistance would be appreciated if a general evacuation were to commence. Ambassador also noted that it might be especially risky for Amcits to travel safely overland to Tripoli or Latakia, and that Beirut might prove to be the only valid evacuation point. Kassimis noted that this was high tourist/travel season in Greece and that available vessels are scarce, but that he would do what he could to assist USG efforts.

¶5. (C) Finally, Ambassador informed the Minister that we had begun thinking of contingency U.S. facilities at NSA Souda Bay for evacuees, in the event that Limassol became overburdened. Souda Bay has barracks space for up to 650 persons, and according to the base commander, could facilitate the onward transfer of up to 1000 evacuees a day. The main problem with Souda is its distance: almost 24-32 hours from Limassol, depending on the speed of the vessel used. Ambassador said that should use of Souda be necessary, the U.S. would want to work closely with Greek naval, immigration, and foreign ministry authorities to stand it up quickly.

¶6. (C) Kassimis seemed favorably inclined towards the

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possible use of Souda Bay, although he did not expressly give GoG assent. He observed that the GoG had "suddenly become important" because of the situation, and would be making every effort to be of assistance to its European and American allies. Kassimis did ask if the U.S. contemplated closing Embassy Beirut. Ambassador indicated that he was not aware of any such plan, but that he would inform Kassimis if the situation changed. Kassimis stressed that the Greek Embassy in Beirut would do whatever it could for any Amcits that found themselves in distress; Ambassador noted the reverse was also true.

¶7. (C) Comment: Kassimis was clearly involved in and well informed of GoG efforts in assisting evacuations from Beirut, and was obviously interested in being as helpful as possible.

Although the discussion of the use of Souda Bay was only theoretical (and additional consultations would be needed should we wish to pursue it), Kassimis was quite positive, and quickly grasped the potential value of the Souda facilities for such a humanitarian mission. Post will remain engaged with Kassimis to secure Greek vessels to support any eventual evacuation efforts. End Comment.

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